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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

In Today's Papers

President Gul Set to Visit Yerevan September 6
All papers gave prominent coverage to the upcoming visit of Turkish President Gul to Armenia. "By taking an historic step, President Gul made a brave decision which will melt ice between the two countries" fronts Hurriyet. Reports mention Foreign Minister Babacan and a delegation of Foreign Ministry diplomats will accompany President Gul on this trip. Both mainstream and Islamist-oriented media outlets' treatment of the decision is, for the most part, overwhelmingly positive. Taraf daily referred to a recent poll conducted by "Metropoll." The survey questioned people in 30 Turkish provinces, and 67.4 percent of respondents supported President Gul's trip to Yerevan. Milliyet, Sabah, Zaman and Hurriyet provided some details about the trip. According to press reports, President Gul will arrive in Yerevan two hours before the soccer game. There will a 'tte-`-tte' meeting between the two Presidents at the Presidential Palace, and then will proceed to the stadium to watch the game. Once the game is over, President Gul and the accompanying delegation will return to Ankara. Islamist-oriented Zaman, in a sidebar, mentioned that the Armenian Football Federation made a gesture to Turkey's decision by changing its logo design. Mount Ararat was replaced with another symbol design consisting of an eagle and a lion.

Editorial Commentary on Gul's Yerevan Trip:

Ertugrul Ozkok wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "President Gul's decision (to attend the football match in Yerevan) is historic and brave and deserves whole-hearted congratulations. A ping-pong game helped facilitate the breaking down of the walls between China and the United States, and today, football is likely to have the same impact on Turkish-Armenian relations. Regardless of the score, the winners of this football match are the Turkish and Armenian people."

Cengiz Candar wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "The Armenian occupation of some Azeri territory was one reason Ankara has not normalized relations with Armenia. This attitude hasn't produced anything positive, moreover, the Armenian occupation has hardened

over the years. Once Turkey and Armenia establish ties and start normalization, it will pave the way to ending the Armenian occupation of Azeri land. Along with so many other reasons, this reason alone is a good enough one for President Gul to go to Yerevan. I suggest Gul read Hrant Dink's book, 'Two Close People and Two Distant Neighbors', before he goes to Yerevan."

Davut Dursun wrote in Islamist leaning Yeni Safak: "Yerevan's invitation to President Gul to attend the game is an indication of the Armenian Administration's intention to change its traditional policy toward Turkey. President Gul is now going, and this will not be an ordinary 'watching the game' event. It is a major step toward normalization of bilateral ties with Armenia. There are problems, but they can all be resolved through dialogue and consensus in the course of time, once relations are proceeding in a normal way."

Omer Taspinar commented in mainstream Sabah: "This football diplomacy has one important mission besides improving ties between Turkey and Armenia, and that is to support stability efforts in the Caucasus and strategic initiatives in Georgia. It will be a start for two nations, who were separated while living in the same land, to move closer to each other and heal their historic wounds together."

Semih Idiz wrote mainstream in Milliyet: "As anticipated, the nationalists in Turkey and Armenia are reacting to President Gul's upcoming visit to Yerevan. A collective effort towards stability in the Caucasus requires a better relationship between Turkey and Armenia. That is why President Gul wants to go to Armenia. This will be a first step towards better relations and efforts to resolve

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long lingering problems. It is not realistic to expect to find a solution to specific problems during this visit. However, this visit will create trust between the two countries and leave resolution of the difficult issues to the future."

Cuneyt Arcayurek in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "Abdullah Gul is making moves that cast a shadow on the ambitious foreign policy goals of Prime Minister Erdogan. Gul called President Bush although there was no urgent necessity to do so. This call coincided with the time period in which Gul was deciding whether to go to Yerevan. And, of course, Bush approved Gul's visit to Armenia, which is happening after so much pressure from the United States. Isn't it likely that Gul might have called Bush to remind the U.S. President that by going to Armenia, he's keeping a promise he made during his visit to Washington?"

Ismail Kucukkaya in mainstream Aksam: "Gul's call on Yerevan is not a personal choice, but a requirement to demonstrate Turkey's maturity, tolerance and courage. Our President should be able to go to Yerevan if our national team is playing there. There will be protests, but that is a risk that must be taken. The days we go through today will be the history of tomorrow; what will be remembered will be the pictures of Gul and Sarkisian watching their national teams together."

TGS Organized Visit to the Two Generals in Jail
Sabah, Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Vatan, Hurriyet and others: Today's papers gave extended front page coverage to the visit of Kocaeli Garrison Commander General Galip Mendi, the highest military official in the region, to retired Generals Hursit Tolon and Sener Eruygur, who have been under detention in connection with the Ergenekon investigation. TGS announced on its website that the visit was on behalf of Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). Most media speculated that this very public announcement was meant to send a public message of support for their retired colleagues. Mainstream Vatan reported that some circles supported Chief of General Staff General Basbug after the visit, arguing that TAF should have done this some time ago, while others criticized the visit as an attempted intervention towards the judiciary. Meanwhile, PM Erdogan described the visit as a humanitarian move.

Editorial Commentary on the Visit to the Generals in Jail:

Mumtazer Turkone in Islamist-oriented Zaman: "The TGS statement

saying a general, on behalf of the Turkish military, visited two retired generals under custody in the Ergenekon investigation places the institutional support of the military behind the two suspects. This visit could also be perceived as an 'intervention' in an ongoing case. The launch of the Ergenekon case took some pressure off of the military, and the arrest of two generals was perceived as the military's support of the elimination of gangs. Now, how do you think the judges of the case should interpret this visit which was ordered by the military's leadership?"

Ergun Babahan wrote in mainstream Sabah: "The visit to Kandira prison yesterday on behalf of the Turkish Armed Forces(TAF), was a political visit. This visit to the jailed retired generals could have been done, but without the need to announce on the TGS web site that it was done on behalf of the TAF. The timing of the visit and its announcement was wrong. Any initiative that could be seen as influencing the judiciary should be avoided."

Melih Asik wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Generals could be tried also. However, if the law is violated during the trial, it becomes a humanitarian duty to try to prevent this. When (Ankara Chamber of Commerce Chairman) Sinan Aygun was detained, TOBB interfered and supported him. But no comment came from the TGS at that time regarding the arrested generals. Maybe the military remained quiet because of their respect for the judiciary. However, the public interpreted this silence as "TGS believes as well that the Generals

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were involved in this case." Yesterday's visit was important to eliminate this misperception. Some interpreted yesterday's visit as interfering with the judiciary. However, demanding respect for supremacy of law is not interference, but a humanitarian duty."

Turkish Charity Case in Germany Charges AKP-Related Figures
Media outlets report about the ongoing court case against the Islamist Deniz Feneri [Lighthouse] charity organization based in Frankfurt, which has been accused of forming a fraud network that allegedly swindled millions of Euro from Turks and other Muslims living in Germany. The organization's accountant, Firdevsi Ermis, and two other suspects, Mehmet Gurkan and Mehmet Taskan, told a court in Frankfurt that from 2002-2007, Deniz Feneri raised 40 million Euro, 18 million of which was then sent to various companies in Turkey, including the Islamist-leaning Kanal 7 TV. Ermis said Turkey's Radio and Television High Council (RTUK) chairman, Zahit Akman, a former partner in the organization, was among the couriers who carried the money. Akman denied the charges as "unfounded" in a press conference Wednesday, saying he had not engaged in Deniz Feneri business since becoming the head of RTUK three years ago. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, however, gives the dates Akman was appointed as RTUK head and the date he resigned from his duties in Deniz Feneri, showing Akman resigned four months after he began his job at RTUK. In "Shadow of Deniz Feneri Falls on AKP," liberal Radikal points to the fact that all the suspects in the case were figures close to the ruling AKP and particularly to Prime Minister Erdogan.

European Court Releases Alleged al-Qaeda Financier al-Kadi's Assets
Islamist-oriented Zaman and Yeni Safak report the European Court of Justice has released the assets of Saudi businessman Yasin al-Kadi and his Sweden-based charity organization International al-Barakat. In 2001, the EU had frozen al-Kadi's assets for financing al-Qaeda. The European court said the EU did not respect al-Kadi's right to a defense while freezing his assets. Yasin al-Kadi's investments in Turkey also had recently been a focus of controversy, but Prime Minister Erdogan defended the Saudi businessmen, who is a personal friend of the PM, by saying he would stand bail for al-Kadi. Papers cite wire services' conclusions that the European court's decision could weaken the EU's sanctions regime.

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- A US navy vessel, the USS Mount Whitney, sails through the

Bosporus Straits and into the Black Sea to deliver humanitarian aid to Georgia.

- President Abdullah Gul said during a joint press briefing with visiting Bosnian Presidency Chairman Haris Silajdzic, "We support the multi-cultural structure in Bosnia-Herzegovina -- therefore, our relations with all ethnic groups are equal."

- Two soldiers who were killed by PKK terrorists in the eastern province of Bingol while participating in an Iftar were laid to rest in their hometowns yesterday. Four PKK terrorists were killed in the skirmish on Tuesday.

International News

- President Bush, in an address to the Republican National Convention via satellite, said that John McCain is ready to lead the nation in a "dangerous world" and will protect the US from terrorism.

- Iraq plans to rebuild the notorious Abu Ghraib prison, which was closed in 2006 after a scandal over abuse of prisoners by US troops.

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- In Beslan, people will come together for three days of commemoration to honor the hostages and soldiers who were killed in a Chechen terrorist raid there on September 3, 2004.

WILSON